

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1 1. A method of confining a commodity in a compo-
2 site container having a plurality of constituents, com-
3 prising the steps of:

4 assembling the constituents into the container
5 around the commodity;

6 providing at least some of the constituents with
7 characteristic indicia not later than in the course of
8 the assembling step;

9 processing the characteristic indicia into informa-
10 tion which is characteristic of the assembled container;
11 and

12 encoding the information upon at least one consti-
13 tuent of the container.

1 2. The method of claim 1, wherein said providing
2 step includes randomly selecting at least one of the
3 characteristic indicia.

1 3. The method of claim 1, wherein said providing
2 step includes applying all of the characteristic indicia
3 to the respective constituents prior to the assembling
4 step.

1 4. The method of claim 1, wherein said encoding
2 step is carried out subsequent to said assembling step.

1 5. The method of claim 1, wherein said providing
2 step includes applying at least one of the
3 characteristic indicia to the respective constituent
4 of the container in the course of said assembling step.

1 6. The method of claim 1, wherein said encoding
2 step includes applying the information to the at least
3 one constituent upon completion of said assembling step.

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1 7. The method of claim 1, wherein said at least
2 one constituent is accessible, at least in part, upon
3 completion of said assembling step.

1 8. The method of claim 7, wherein the encoded
2 information is decodable without necessitating even par-
3 tial opening of the assembled container.

1 9. The method of claim 1 of confining a commodity
2 in a container having a plurality of constituents
3 including an inner envelope directly surrounding the
4 commodity in the assembled container, an outer envelope
5 surrounding the inner envelope, an insert disposed
6 between the inner and outer envelopes of the assembled
7 container, a light-transmitting outermost envelope
8 surrounding the outer envelope of the assembled con-
9 tainer, and a tear strip borne by the outermost
10 envelope, wherein said providing step includes applying
11 indicia to each of the inner, outer and outermost enve-
12 lopes as well as to the insert and to the tear strip.

1 10. The method of claim 9, wherein said
2 assembling step includes confining the commodity in the
3 inner envelope, thereupon applying the insert around
4 a selected part of the inner envelope, thereafter
5 confining the inner envelope and the insert in the outer
6 envelope, and thereafter applying the outermost
7 envelope, with the tear strip thereon, around the outer
8 envelope.

1 11. The method of claim 1, wherein said
2 assembling step includes advancing the commodity along
3 a predetermined path and draping the constituents of
4 the container around the advancing commodity in a prede-
5 termined sequence in successive portions of said path.

1 12. The method of claim 1, further comprising
2 the step of processing into said information data per-
3 taining to at least one of (a) the commodity and (b)
4 the container.

1 13. The method of claim 12, wherein said data
2 denote at least one of the time of the assembling step,
3 the location of the assembling step and at least one
4 person in charge of the assembling step.

1 14. The method of claim 1, wherein said encoding
2 step includes visibly applying said information to an
3 exposed part of at least one constituent of the
4 assembled container.

1 15. Apparatus for confining successive ones of
2 a series of commodities in composite containers each
3 of which has a set of constituents, comprising:

4 means for conveying successive commodities of the
5 series along a predetermined path;

6 means for assembling the constituents of the sets
7 into containers, including placing the constituents
8 around successive commodities in a predetermined sequence
9 in successive portions of the path;

10 means for providing at least some constituents
11 of each set with characteristic indicia not later than
12 in the respective portions of said path;

13 means for processing the characteristic indicia
14 on said at least some constituents of each set into in-
15 formation which is characteristic of the respective as-
16 sembled containers; and

17 means for encoding the information upon the res-
18 pective containers.

1 16. The apparatus of claim 15, wherein at least
2 some of the characteristic indicia are randomly selected
3 indicia.

1 17. The apparatus of claim 15, wherein said
2 assembling means comprises a cigarette packing machine.

1 18. The apparatus of claim 15, wherein said means
2 for providing includes at least one laser.

1 19. The apparatus of claim 15, wherein said means
2 for providing includes at least one printer.

1 20. The apparatus of claim 15, wherein the consti-
2 tuents of each set include a first blank for conversion
3 into an inner envelope of a container, a second blank
4 for conversion into an outer envelope of a container,
5 a third blank for conversion into an outermost envelope
6 of a container and an insert for conversion into a
7 collar between the inner and outer envelopes of a con-
8 tainer, said providing means including a first laser
9 for the application of indicia to first blanks, a second
10 laser for the application of indicia to second blanks,
11 a first printer for the application of indicia to
12 inserts and a second printer for the application of in-
13 dicia to third blanks, said means for encoding including
14 a laser.

1 21. The apparatus of claim 20, wherein the
2 constituents of each set further include a tear strip
3 borne by the respective third blank, said second printer
4 being arranged to apply indicia to the tear strips.

1 22. The apparatus of claim 20, further comprising
2 additional conveying means for delivering the blanks
3 and the inserts to the respective portions of said path.